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SUBJECT: Niger - Update on Trafficking in Persons

Ref: a) Niamey 502 b) Niamey 447 c) Niamey 281
d) Niamey 273 e) Niamey 99 f) Niamey 92

11. Overview: Although Embassy Niamey has engaged in discussion with Washington regarding trafficking in persons-related issues over the past year, including through its Trafficking in Persons, Human Rights, Child Labor, Advancing Freedom and Democracy, and other annual reports, much of this information has been shared with limited audiences. To inform a broader range of issue stakeholders and afford Washington a full perspective, Embassy Niamey takes this opportunity to provide a more systematic updating on the various measures that have been taking place over the past 18 months in Niger. End overview.

GON Actions/Activities re TIP in 2008 - 2009

12. During the period of January 1, 2008 - July 29, 2009, the following actions and/or activities took place in Niger regarding addressing trafficking in persons:

-- In February 2008, the village chief of Nobi, Tahoua region, handed over to Timidria 20 persons rescued from caste-based servitude. Timidria intends to carry out a project in order to support their socio-economic reinsertion; although Timidria has submitted proposals and funding requests to various stakeholders, no response has been received so far.

-- On March 22, 2008, the Minister of Justice was a keynote speaker when the French Cultural Center hosted the official unveiling of two books on slavery in Africa, one of which was Niger-specific. The event received wide media coverage.

-- In March 2008, RDM Tanafili, a local NGO, with support from local authorities, rescued and assisted six families of former slaves (totaling some 40 persons) in purchasing land from their former masters in Tajae, Tahoua Region. The NGO was expected to sponsor the families for one year by providing them with food, livestock to start a new life, and education for their children.

-- In March 2008, the Government, with support from UNICEF, completed the establishment of regional committees to control child trafficking in most regions of the country. The overall objective for these committees was to undertake all necessary actions that help prevent child trafficking, dismantle any trafficking rings, and sensitize the population on women's and children's trafficking issues.

-- On July 1-4, 2008, the Minister of Women's Promotion and Children's Protection chaired a regional training workshop for journalists from nine countries on child labor and trafficking.

-- In July 2008, the National Commission for Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties (CNDHLF) published a study on "The Problem of Forced Labor, Child Labor, and all Forms of Slavery Practices in Niger." The CNDHLF called the report "a national reference document."

-- On October 27, in a landmark ruling regarding the case Timidria and Hadidjatou Mani Koraou vs. the Government of Niger, the Economic Community of West African States Court of Justice recognized that Mani Koraou had been a victim of slavery and held the Government of Niger responsible for the inaction of its administrative and legal services, which failed to protect a woman sold into slavery. The Court fined the Government of Niger 10 million CFA (\$20,000) in damages for the victim. The Government complied with the ruling and paid the fine on March 17, 2009.

-- On November 25-27, 2008, the Government, with support from French Cooperation, hosted a regional seminar on terrorism and trafficking, including trafficking in persons. One of the workshops focused on training law enforcement officers on prosecution, special investigation techniques, witness protection, and international cooperation in the fight against trafficking.

-- On December 22, 2008, the Court of Appeals of Niamey held hearings on the 2006 slavery case of Timidria and Assibit Wanagoda vs. Tafane Abouzeidi. In the verdict it delivered on February 9, 2009, the court found no grounds for prosecution and dismissed the case.

-- On December 29, 2008, the second ordinary session of Niger's youth parliament focused on calling the attention of NGOs and the public to children's rights with regard to situations such as child labor, begging, and prostitution.

-- In December 2008, the Ministry of Labor, in conjunction with the National Statistics Institute, completed the initial stage of a nationwide study that will generate data on children's education,

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economic, and non-economic activities and create a qualitative and quantitative database of information and statistics regarding child labor in Niger. On January 16, 2009, the MOL launched the final stage of a survey. During a June 2009 visit to artisanal gold mines by Embassy officers, MOL staff stated that its study work would be completed within the near future; an April 2009 projection foresaw project completion in the third quarter of 2009.

-- In 2008, the GON cooperated with the Governments of Mali and Benin in investigating and prosecuting several child trafficking cases.

-- In 2008, the Government undertook several initiatives to assist trafficking victims. Local authorities assisted UNICEF and a local NGO partner to identify and rehabilitate child victims of TIP in the Agadez region. Local police and prosecutors arrested and prosecuted traffickers identified by the project, and ensured that rescued victims were handed over to a local NGO for rehabilitation. A total 37 children were placed in rehabilitation centers.

-- In 2008, the Makalondi Welcome and Transit Center, in cooperation with Nigerien police and international organizations, rescued, rehabilitated, and returned to their families 44 children victims of trafficking from Mali and Niger.

-- The Government conducted several anti-trafficking information and education campaigns during 2008. Senior GON officials made remarks at the openings of training sessions on TIP, and Government media covered the events, making them a tool for enhanced public awareness of TIP.

-- On February 16, 2009, Niger police referred to a local NGO a young Nigerien woman suspected victim of trafficking. The woman was 14 years old when a Togo national lured her to travel with him to Togo, where he obtained false identity documents for her, married her, and had two children with her. According to the woman's parents, Togolese law enforcement authorities kept custody of the children, but did not indict the suspected trafficker. The woman and her parents sought assistance in taking legal action in order to claim custody of the two children.

-- During a meeting with Embassy Charge d'Affaires on April 9, 2009,

the Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice reported that in March 2009 the Tribunal of Konni had sentenced several people in connection to slavery cases. In a separate case, the Dosso Tribunal sentenced a man who abducted his niece to Benin.

-- The GON continued to seek opportunities to train its law enforcement officers on TIP, TIP victim, and perpetrator identification, and relevant legislation and treaty commitments. On June 19-20, 2009, the ILO organized a training session for the National Commission Against Forced Labor and Discrimination. The workshop was aimed at strengthening the capacities of this body, and included a presentation on the social insertion of slavery practices' victims. On June 25-26, 2009, the ILO held a similar session for judges, lawyers, and bailiffs.

-- On April 3, 2009, ECOWAS ministers responsible for issues relating to trafficking in persons adopted a policy that would provide the region with the legal mechanism for protecting and assisting victims of trafficking. The policy commits Member States to provide victims of TIP equitable access to assistance programs focused on easing their integration and enabling them to become functional members of society. The policy's core areas include reception, identification, sheltering, health, counseling, family tracing, return/repatriation, integration, empowerment, follow-up, after care, and disengagement of victims.

-- On June 10-12, 2009, on the occasion of the World Day Against Child Labor, the International Labor Organization International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO/IPEC) organized various public events and a conference aimed to raise awareness on the issues Niger faces in combating the worst forms of child labor (ref B).

-- On June 16, 2009, Niger's First Lady and the Minister of Women's Promotion and Children's Protection chaired a town hall meeting to sensitize the public on the occasion of the African Children's Day. Several cabinet members, diplomats, international organization representatives, NGOs, and the public attended the event. The Minister of Women's Promotion and Children's Protection stressed the GON's commitment to implement the relevant ILO conventions ratified by Niger, notably ILO Convention 182, in order to improve the situation of Niger's children. The Minister called on the population to "massively" participate in all of the child protection sensitization sessions; she also urged the media to provide extensive coverage of the activities. During the event, the Coalition of NGOs and Associations supporting Childhood in Niger

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(CONAFE-Niger) made a public advocacy in which it welcomed "encouraging progress" in child protection; however, CONAFE-Niger "deplores the National Committee on Child Survival's lethargy and the lack of resources to facilitate its work...CONAFE-Niger is deeply concerned by the non-adoption of the Children's Code and the anti-trafficking law, and the inexistence of several legal provisions."

-- On June 25, 2009, Embassy officers visited three artisanal gold mines in Tillabery region and noted that the GON and several NGOs have made noticeable investments in both infrastructure and social programs to combat the problem of child labor and trafficking (ref A).

-- On July 28, 2009, the Nigerien Association for the Fight against Delinquency (ANTD), a local NGO working on child labor and trafficking, and the Open Society for West Africa (OSIWA), organized a three-day workshop to sensitize marabouts (religious teachers) on the promotion of rights and the fight against children's forced and illegal migration. Ambassador Allen opened the workshop, and reiterated USG and her strong personal support for efforts to combat child labor and trafficking.

Comment:

13. Although Niger has very limited resources to address trafficking in persons, and currently is involved in complex political developments, the past 18 months has nonetheless seen a series of

small-scale activities to address it. Continued efforts to improve conditions and attitudes will need the assistance of international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure success.

ALLEN